

WELCOME TO THE HIGH HOLY DAYS AT CONGREGATION AM HAYAM

B'ruchim Ha-ba'im and shanah tovah! Welcome to Congregation Am HaYam. A good New Year to you and yours!

We hope you find our High Holy Day services meaningful, uplifting, and inspiring. Our services are participatory in structure. Everyone is welcome to join in for most every prayer or reading. In order to help, transliterations have been provided for most every Hebrew prayer we do communally. We also read English prayers in the *machzor* (the High Holy Day prayer book). In addition, we have provided a spiral booklet and a handout with special readings that we hope will touch you. Please try to join with the congregation as the spirit moves you!

The Synagogue is a place for reflection, a place to feel your ancestors and G!d calling to you, a place to feel connection with your fellow Jews. Another aspect of prayer is to stimulate self-examination and challenge us to reach our full potential as humans.

As you experience the High Holy Days with us, please keep in mind several things that can help make the service personally uplifting:

1) **PRAY HONESTLY**

Affirm that which rings in your heart. Struggle with sections you may not understand or with which you cannot nod in agreement. Are there ways to interpret the section so that it feels more comfortable to you? Might you need to consciously skip certain paragraphs? Know that your integrity regarding the words you do recite is very important.

2) **PRAY PURPOSEFULLY**

Five minutes of prayer recited with feeling and personal connection to the values the prayers convey mean far more than hours of merely reciting words mindlessly, without thought. Ask yourself if the prayer motivates you to do something different in your life, or to look at things in a different way. Let the prayers teach you about yourself and your religion.

3) **PRAY COMFORTABLY**

It can be very important to find a pace that feels right. Too often, people feel they are not fulfilling the obligation to pray unless they are on the same page as the congregation. We feel it is better to read through the prayers at your own pace; don't be concerned if the congregation is doing a different prayer. Page numbers are called out regularly; you can always rejoin the community when you are ready.

So linger on prayers that touch you--repeat the words and let them seep into your soul. If you like, close your eyes and say words and phrases that speak to you over and over--thinking about their implications for your life.

4) **PRAY MEANINGFULLY**

Join in with what's going on as best you can. There is a wonderful feeling when the congregation is singing or davening together--be part of that feeling. If you don't understand Hebrew, it's o.k. Let the sound of the Hebrew speak to you like a mantra or, alternatively, pray in English or use the transliterations. Hum along with the melodies, letting them touch you. Consider finding a mentor (we can help with this)--someone to ask about the service and to watch as you learn and participate. There are members who will gladly do this with you.

5) **PRAY CONNECTEDLY**

As you sit in synagogue, know that you are joined by millions of Jews around the world: feel and bask in that connection. Be open and warm to those around you--say "hello" to those you may not know. Try to avoid speaking about other people or your regular weekday matters too much--or take a break to walk outside to hold such conversations, away from the sacred environment of the sanctuary. Feel a link to the past, to our heritage as you recite the words which have meant so much to our people throughout the ages. The spirit of friendship, caring, community, and tradition all enhance the holy day season.

We hope that you find that this year's High Holy Day services touch you and enrich you. Please do not hesitate to ask if we might enhance your experience here.

We thank you for joining us this year. Your presence has enriched our experience.

L'shanah tovah u-m'tukah tikateivu v'teichateimu b'Sefer Chayyim Tovim.

May you and your loved ones be written and sealed in the Book of Life for a good, sweet, healthy year.

Congregation Am HaYam Ritual Team
Neal Abramson, Ritual Committee Chair